

I've been listening to the music of Bob Dylan for what is becoming increasingly close to fifty years. Little did I know when I first found about him what a wild ride I'd be taken on.

The first Dylan song I remember hearing was "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." It was at a Pete Seeger concert in New Jersey in 1963, where he also sang "Who Killed Davey Moore?" If he mentioned Dylan's name, it didn't stick with me, but both those songs did, especially "Hard Rain." I'd never heard a song anything like it before, and that was mainly because there *was* nothing like it before. I remember my dad turning to me at the end of the song, and asking me what I thought it was about. I think I said the bomb.

That summer I was sent to camp somewhere in Maryland. "Blowin' In The Wind" by Peter, Paul & Mary was a huge hit. I'd hear it all the time on the various transistor radios at the camp, but I didn't put that song together with the songs from the Seeger concert.

At the end of the summer, I returned home to a new home in a new town in a new state. My older brother came home from a different camp, and was now playing harmonica in addition to guitar. He told me all about this guy named Bob Dylan and played me some of his songs on the guitar like "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright." He had a holder and played the guitar at the same time. Both of us had grown up listening to folk music, Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, The Weavers. My younger brother came home from yet another camp, and had birthday presents for me and my brother, since both our birthdays were over the summer, a Pete Seeger album for me, *We Shall Overcome*, that had both "Hard Rain" and "Davey Moore," and *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* for my brother.

As it turned out, Dylan was appearing on a TV show that very week about freedom songs. He sang "Blowin' In The Wind" and "Only A Pawn In Their Game." To my 12-year-old mind, he looked like Woody Guthrie. I was taken and had never seen a performer of a face so expressive. I spent that autumn listening constantly to *Freewheelin'*. That November, Dylan played a concert in Newark, New Jersey. My parents bought us tickets. It was the first concert I went to without my parents. Our seats were in the balcony, but the show was far from sold out, so during intermission we snuck down to something like the eighth row.

A couple of months later, I walked into my local record store, and there was *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. It was my first instant buy. Having grown up listening to folk music and also being exposed to poetry, for Bob Dylan to enter my life at the time he did was both

perfect and natural. Both the song and the album changed my life, the way I thought, what I thought about, how I acted, everything.

At the end of the next summer, a new Bob Dylan album appeared, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. It was a much different record than either *Freewheelin'* or *Times*. There were no topical songs or protest songs or political songs. The closest song on there to any of those topics was *Chimes Of Freedom*, but it was about another kind of freedom than freedom from racial oppression though that was in the song. It was about personal freedom. Most of the rest of the songs were love songs and at least three of the songs sounded suspiciously like rock 'n' roll though it was all Dylan solo on guitar and harp (and piano for the first time on one song).

Shortly after the album came out, the latest edition of *Sing Out! Magazine*, the folk song magazine arrived in the mail. One of the articles was "An Open Letter To Bob Dylan," by the magazine's editor Irwin Silber. Basically Silber was getting on Dylan's case for moving away from topical and protest songs. My brother and I had tickets for Dylan's upcoming concert in New York City on Halloween at Philharmonic Hall. The "open letter" left me wondering if Dylan would still sing the songs I'd grown to love over the past year.

Back then Dylan who had stopped playing clubs in the New York City area would only appear once or twice a year. When you went to a Bob Dylan concert, it was not only to see him sing, but also to hear what new songs he had and what those songs would say. At Philharmonic Hall that Halloween, Dylan not only sang the topical songs that made him famous (including ones that weren't on record), but the new songs from *Another Side* and several songs even newer than another side. Imagine going to a concert and hearing for the first time, "Mister Tambourine Man," "Gates of Eden," and "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)." And in addition to that there were two other new songs, "Mama You Been On My Mind" and "If You Gotta Go." I thought "Mr. Tambourine Man" was the most beautiful song I'd ever heard, and couldn't wait to hear it again.

A few months later in February of 1965, Dylan appeared on the Les Crane TV show, a late-night talk show. He was the featured guest. He sang "It's Alright Ma" and debuted "It's All Over Now Baby Blue." Accompanying Dylan on guitar was Bruce Langhorne, who was a known folk sideman in New York. Langhorne played a Martin acoustic, but in the sound hole was a pickup. Dylan was also dressed differently than he was at the two concerts I saw or any of the photos of him I'd started collecting. Gone was the suede jacket and jeans he usually performed in replaced by a suit and shirt with cuff links.

Dylan was the primary guest on the show and chatted with Les Crane for most of the program. Almost everything he said was totally hysterical. When the show was over my brother said to be, "He'd make a great rock 'n' roll singer."

Not long after the show, maybe a few weeks, I was listening to the radio one night to the Jerry White show, a nightly folk music program broadcast on WJRZ which covered the New York metropolitan area. Cautiously White said he had a new Bob Dylan single which was strange in itself because Dylan put out albums not single. He then played "Subterranean Homesick Blues." Oh my god, Dylan with a band playing rock 'n' roll! I didn't know what to think at first, but bought the single when it hit the stores. Not long after *Bringing It All Back Home* came out. Finally "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "It's Alright Ma." I played that album over and over again, often in a row. No song ever expressed what I was feeling deep inside the way "It's Alright Ma" did, and considering I wasn't even 14, I didn't even know what a lot of it even meant.

That summer while at camp, my brother came up to me one day and said, "Dylan has a new single. It has an organ on it." I went crazy trying to find a radio to hear it, but soon "Like A Rolling Stone" was played on the top 40 stations all the time. It was announced that Dylan would be playing at Forest Hills Tennis stadium in Queens. The show was the day camp ended and I went with a bunch of kids from the camp. I remember getting off the bus, handing my dad my duffel bag, and saying see you tomorrow and taking the subway to Forest Hills.

Standing in line we could hear the band practicing over the walls. Once in the stadium, even though it was August it was cold and windy. A line-up of several top 40 disc jockeys, plus Jerry White introduced Dylan. This was something new. At the two previous concerts, there was no introduction. The lights would go down, he'd walk onstage. One of the dj's was Murray the K, who at the time was calling himself the fifth Beatle. I later became a fan of Murray the K, but at the time having him say stuff like, "I just wanna tell you baby that Bobby is what's happening baby" was a little too much. Dylan came out and opened with "She Belongs To Me." During a harp break, he walked to the side of the stage and posed for photos for the press. Gone from the set were any songs from before *Another Side*. He did one new song, "Desolation Row" that had the crowd in hysterical laughter for the first few minutes.